

AMAZING THAILAND

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A new trip—this time to Thailand! I had previously taken a photo of a herbarium specimen at the Royal Herbarium in Bangkok and wanted to see the plant in the wild, alive. The sample was of a *Nepenthes* from Phu Kradung, a high mountain plateau in Northeastern Thailand.

Before heading to Phu Kradung I wanted to visit a nursery owned by a person I know named Toong. Toong sold *Nepenthes* in Bangkok and had a large collection of Thai species from all over the country. I bought a couple of interesting *Nepenthes*, and then prepared for the next part of my trip.

So there I was in Thailand's Bangkok bus terminal. As I climbed onto the bus I recalled my wife's nephew telling me to get off at Panukao. Then, Davee told me, I must take a *songao* (public transport) to Phu Kradung.

"OK," I thought to myself, "Panukao, *songao*, Phu Kradung." I had it memorized, no problem.

Stepping into the overly air-conditioned bus I could feel the temperature plummet. Déjà vu—this was just like the sprinter train trip to I took to Chiang Mai on my first visit—I should have brought heavier clothes. The bus travelled on and on into the night. After about the 6th or 7th stop along the way I became concerned about when I should get off. Panu-what? The bus stopped again, and feeling a little brave (or desperate) I whipped out my Thai language phrase book and asked in my hillbilly twang "Is this my stop?" to one of the student passengers. In perfect English, the student replied, "Yes we are all going to Phu Kradung."

The bus arrived in Panukao near dawn. Hopping onto the *songao* heading for Phu Kradung, the sunrise was spectacular as it shone onto the hills surrounding Panukao!

At the park headquarters, after a brief check in, I loaded my pack onto a *Luk Hop* (porter). Well-marked trails led up towards the summit. Many people travel to the top and today was no exception—it was a very sociable hike. Since the scenery was outstanding, I took my time going up, and I was nearly the last one to arrive at the 1288m (4226 ft) summit just before dusk.

The next morning, I took a short 4 km (2.5 mile) hike to check in at the ranger station. During this hike, I came across my first *Nepenthes anamensis* on Phu Kradung—a mere 300 meters down the trail. Oh what a sight, as the plant fits its name!¹ Overcome with joy, I jumped into the bush with camera in hand for a closer look (Figure 1, on left).

After a while it started getting dark, and I had decided I had better check in at the ranger station. As I trodded along the trail I felt something odd in my shoe—yes, land-leeches. I took off my shoe, and after a quick flick I was on my way. Back at the ranger station, the staff was kind enough to give me a travel map, and also more locations for pitcher plants.

The next day I started on a trek that looped around west towards the cliffs. This trip passed through a pine forest and a peat bog. *Drosera burmannii* was growing

¹*Nepenthes*: a drug mentioned in the Odyssey, fabled to drive away care and make people forget their woes—*Ed.*



Figure 1: *Nepenthes anamensis* in Thailand.

in sandy areas, while *U. bifida* and *U. delphinioides* grew along the trail within pools and depressions in the peat bog.

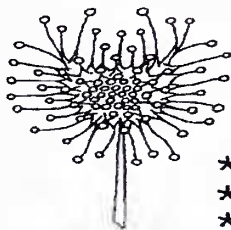
Nepenthes covered most of the plateau every 5-15 meters (Figure 1, on right). The populations were heavier along the cliffs. Retiring back to my bungalow that evening I set out the next morning to see the famous sunrise at Nok An's cliff. Many other campers were already waiting. We all sat on the cliff's edge, shivering until the sun came up. What a sight! I spent the rest of that day visiting waterfalls.

Returning to Bangkok I had the pleasure of visiting the Rama IX Botanical Park on Thailand Father's Day (December 5th). Kasem Chandraprasong was a horticultural consultant for the park, and I was pleased to visit with him. I wandered across the park's fabulous 80 hectares (200 acres)—filled with hundreds of thousand of families celebrating the holiday. A fitting finale to wonderful trip.

I would like to thank all my friends in Thailand, especially the Nacharung family, for making this trip the best ever.

—The editors wish to thank Heiko Rischer for confirming the identity of the species of *Nepenthes* that Tom saw on his interesting trip to Thailand.

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